Impact of Greater Market Access in Agricultural Products

886. SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government conceded that greater market access in agricultural products would expose this sector to greater competition from abroad, and make farmers more vulnerable;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the reasons for taking such steps?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) to (c) The Government is of the view that Agriculture in India is primarily subsistence agriculture and impinges on the livelihood of millions of farmers. The provision of greater market access of agricultural products would need to be carefully calibrated, with adequate safeguards so as to protect this vulnerable sector. This is especially relevant when a large number of developed countries continue to provide substantial amount of trade distorting support to their farmers. The Government therefore, at the WTO talks are negotiating for the substantial elimination of trade distorting support as well as the elimination of all export subsidies. In order to protect our farmers, India under the aegis of G-33 has been able to obtain the self designation of an appropriate number of Special Products on which more flexible market access provisions would be available. The Government are also negotiating a Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM) to protect our farmers against import surges and price depression.

The negotiations are proceeding with a view to establish modalities in agriculture by 30 April 2006, with draft Schedules to be submitted by July 31, 2006, under an overall resolve by WTO Ministers at Hong Kong to complete the Doha Work Programme fully and conclude negotiations in 2006.